

View From the Pew
By Meredith Mackin Rilley

“The first thing I do when I get to church is kneel down and say thank you. Thank you for this church, this community, the people.” Kathy Hanley, one of the leaders of the MOMS ministry at St. Edward the Confessor, like so many of the ministry leaders there, goes to church for so much more than weekly Mass. Most of these leaders don’t see what is apparent from the view from where the parishioners sit: They give at least as much as they receive. St. Edward’s parish is built on a theme of “Time, Talent & Treasure”, which was created as a vision of the evolution of the Catholic Church. This stewardship program glimpses into a future of fewer and fewer priests, requiring more and more secular participation to keep alive the many facets of what a church truly is. Meeting this new world’s all-inclusive approach, the church reaches out and to everyone who is willing to be ministered to and who is willing to do the ministering.

When a citizen walks through the doors of our church, it doesn’t take long to see the many oars that have propelled this ship from the past to the present and which will gracefully steer us through the changing tides ahead. The people behind each oar are generous of their time, talent or treasure (and frequently all three) and there are many of them. In servicing the 2,400 families in our parish, which is 7,980 individuals, there are as many as 850 volunteers, yet only 23 paid employees, consisting of 2 priests, 1 senior priest, 2 deacons and 18 lay staff. The numbers reveal the obvious reliance on the good will of volunteers, but don’t reveal exactly what that good will is. Following is a brief description put forth by ministry leaders, of many of St. Edward’s ministries and how they reach out to the community of New Fairfield and its surrounding areas.

Family Life’s MOMS (Ministry of Moms Sharing): Mary Ronan, author and popular speaker at MOMS has been known to say, “If I can get to the mom, I can get to the whole family.” Kathy Hanley knows first hand how sharing faith and prayer time with a sisterhood of like-minded people is good for her family. “What I learn there, I put toward my family.” And there is a lot to learn. Formerly known as Mom’s Morning Out, the new leaders opted to broaden the audience with its new name and fresh logo, hoping to eliminate the misconception that MOMS only benefits mothers of young children. “We designed the program for moms and caregivers who are looking for faith-filled programs, time for prayer and spiritual direction that they can share with their families,” Kathy said. Programs planned for this year are: The currently running retreat on choice-making with Spiritual Director, Anne Falcone; A Thanksgiving and Advent discussion with Msgr. Ryan in November; A 3 session Lenten program with Pam Arsenault; The annual Mother’s Day brunch with author, lay missionary and mother of 5, Donna Marie Cooper O’Boyle (<http://donnacoperoboyale.blogspot.com/>); Plus many fun mornings with topics like learn how to knit, a talk on chocolate and the annual Christmas party. Kathy summarized the goal. “We are trying to create an environment where women come in on their own level and which leaves them centered, lifted and enriched.”

Social Concerns’ AmeriCares: AmeriCares is a nonprofit international organization. On the first Saturday in May, AmeriCares sponsors a homefront day throughout western CT and NY where homes of needy families are made clean, safe, and dry. St. Edward’s has participated in the AmeriCares Homefront Project for the past 11 years, having repaired 12 homes. Over the course of 2 weekends, over 100 volunteers participate in this worthwhile and rewarding project. St. Edward’s has helped families in New Fairfield and Bethel as well as the Dorothy Day House. locally chaired by Doris McDermott, this is a parish wide event and individuals can help in many ways, including giving financial support, donating for any of the volunteers meals throughout the

day or actually helping with the repairs. Bishop Lori has designated the AmeriCares Homefront project as the charitable initiative for this year of the Pastoral Plan for Evangelization. He is hoping all 87 parishes in diocese will participate in this project. For interested parishioners, informational meetings are held in the early spring.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA): Run by Deacon Frank Foyt, RCIA reaches out to citizens rather than recruit them, beckoning them to have a conversation about faith. The foundation presented to seekers is the deep belief in the Catholic Church and its offering of the truest following of the teaching of Christ. The offer presented is simply to explore the joys of Catholicism, refreshingly emphasizing that the program is one of explanation and understanding, not an attempt at conversion. Having 20 years of experience working specifically with the RCIA program in 3 different parish settings, Deacon Frank explained RCIA's origins. "The process came out of the Second Vatican Council. It was implemented in many varied ways and an ad hoc 'forum' (The North American Forum) was established to provide guidance and development. The process has pretty much matured and is available in just about every parish although its implementation varies due to time and talent available." He also spoke about the option not to convert. "We honestly don't believe it is our job [to convert]. Many who participate in this program make an independent decision to become Catholic, but I can personally tell you that some of my fondest recollections are of those who came just to learn and understand, enjoy the coffee and goodies, and become good friends." Those who are curious about Catholic teaching or who know someone who may be interested in learning more about Catholicism should contact Deacon Frank at ffoyt@saintedwardchurch.org.

St. Matthew's Guild: A select group of parishioners, these volunteers serve the pastor and church by accounting for the contributions made by their fellow parishioners. Their responsibility is to ensure that our parish has the necessary funds on deposit to cover its ongoing expenses. The "Guild" takes its name from St Matthew, who, before becoming an apostle of Christ, was a tax collector. There are four teams of "tax collectors" who meet once every 3 weeks to take on the large task of sorting through donations. The advent of enabling contributions via credit card and EFTs (Electronic Fund Transfers) serves to lighten their workload. Louis Roller, who serves with the Guild, put out a call for help. "We would encourage all parishioners to use one of these new avenues to support our parish. We joke among ourselves that we wouldn't mind losing our jobs if the reason was due to everyone making their contributions electronically." Louis added a light note to his plea, saying, "If you enjoy light and happy banter with your fellow parishioners, this is the ministry for you. It also helps if you enjoy drinking coffee and eating donuts."

Ministers of Hospitality (Ushers): "Oftentimes the first faces to greet a church attendee, ushers serve to grease the gears of the liturgy whether it be for a Mass, Communion or Confirmation," said Louis Roller, a former usher. The ushers serve to keep activities on track collecting contributions, selecting the gift bearers, and ensuring the smooth flow of communion recipients. Since moving to the new larger church, more ushers are required for masses and other liturgies. This ministry is open to all parish members, young and old, male and female. While more individuals are needed to be regular members of this ministry, individuals are also needed on an ad hoc basis.

Administration Committee: The Administration Committee provides the key lay leadership of the parish. They are a volunteer Pastoral council called forth from the parish community to serve as advisors to the pastor on matters ranging from daily parish operations to strategic issues relating to the future direction and mission of the Parish. The members of the committee represent a cross-section of the parish so that the views of different sectors of the parish community are

covered during the discussions held in our monthly meetings. They are active in other ministries within the parish and one of their goals is to keep a finger on the pulse of the community as a means of being an efficient sounding board for Msgr. Ryan. Doug Dorsey has been a part of the committee for 10 years and has seen it evolve from a small group of 5 members to the current size of 10, with each member of the committee having a varied business background to go along with their parish backgrounds. He explained that this provides for an environment of open and thoughtful discussion that brings a real-world feel to the topics the committee reviews. Currently, they are in need of more representation from the parents of our youth, having only one member with children currently in the Faith Formation program. The committee meets on the first Monday of the month/eleven months each year (no meeting is held in July).

Blue Ribbon Committee: The Blue Ribbon Committee is responsible for the maintenance of all church properties (the Church building, the AMC and the rectory). The committee's activities include negotiating different contracts for services for the church's buildings and its grounds, such as church cleaning, lawn care, snow removal, heating and air conditioning, pest control, and maintenance and repair of the organ. Pete Greco, head of the Blue Ribbon Committee, explains the necessity of preventive maintenance. "It's important that the facilities remain a safe place for all, that it's clean at all times and that the exterior of the facilities is pleasing to both our neighbors and our parishioners. We've also evolved the committee from reacting to maintenance and repair situations to projecting when necessary repairs may be required, giving the finance committee sufficient time to provide the funds." To minimize the expense to the parish, the committee has enlisted the assistance of volunteers to perform some of the maintenance and repair projects and have also creatively worked with the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, providing projects for them to achieve their Eagle Scout or Gold awards.

Liturgy Committee: Chaired by Arlene Callahan, this committee is comprised of clergy and volunteers, serving the parish to plan prayerful, dynamic liturgies and to promote and strengthen the liturgical life of the parish family. Collectively, the committee fosters full and active participation of the parish at Liturgies. In its work, it considers the growing parish, ever-evolving to serve the diverse needs of parishioners in every stage of life. St. Edward's celebrates 6 liturgies each weekend, welcoming all in the community to attend a liturgy to fit their family schedule. The introduction of the "Magnifikids" Mass booklets for children was an adaptation to bring the Mass and prayer closer to the lives of children at Liturgy. In addition, the priests tailor Sunday's 9 a.m. homily to families of young children and invite them to sit at the steps of the altar to hear and share the loving presence of God in their lives.

Finance Committee: This committee is mandated by the Diocese and has an advisory function of helping the Pastor maintain excellent accounting policies and control over all financial aspects of St Edward's parish. Chaired by Don Morgenstern, this committee initiated the Time, Talent & Treasure Stewardship program. "As part of the Stewardship program we are currently recommitting our support of the parish. We are encouraging parishioners to consider giving via EFT (Electronic funds transfer) or Credit cards, hoping that these modalities will allow our Offertory to remain constant even if inclement weather would lessen Sunday attendance. Our job is to allow all the other ministries to flourish within the limits of our financial abilities with complete transparency."

With a renewed awareness of St. Edward's being so much more than a building for weekly Mass, the question is raised: When non-practicing Catholics drive past the doors of St. Edward's on their way to work or from picking up their children from school activities, do they look at the building as a weekly task that they are happy to avoid or do they see the deep well that a

community like St. Edward's is? Our church is a faith well into which we can dip in and fill our thirsty souls and to which we can also pour in when our cups are brimming. For more information on how you can dip or pour your cup in or from any of St. Edward's ministries, please go to www.saintedwardchurch.org/